

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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QUO VADIS?, FAMOUS PIONEER FILM, TO BE SHOWN AT MUSEUM MAY 16-22

The early Italian classic Quo Vadis?, produced in 1912, will be shown at the Museum of Modern Art once daily at 4 p.m. during the week of May 16-22, instead of Carnival in Flanders, previously announced.

After a 13-year search, the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art has finally found and acquired, from Switzerland, an original print of the famous Quo Vadis? A motion picture classic, this ranks as one of the most influential of all time, equal in importance to The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, The Birth of a Nation and Potemkin. Though well remembered, Quo Vadis? has not been seen in this country for more than 20 years.

Produced in Italy in 1912, this spectacle film is 8 reels or nearly 2 hours long. Yet in America at that time, studios were cautiously exploring the possibilities of the 2-reel film, and the usual one-reel film was to be seen for a nickel in the nickelodeons - tiny, wooden-benched rooms used for projection. Even in other parts of Europe pictures ran at most to only 4 or 5 reels. When Quo Vadis? was imported for American distribution in 1913, its unusual length placed it far beyond the scope of the nickelodeons. George Kleine, one of the leading film distributors at that time, decided to place the film in the large legitimate theatres. He opened it at the Astor Theatre in New York on April 21, 1913, where it played for 22 weeks with an unprecedented top admission price of \$1.00. Its success was immediate and was sustained throughout the country.

The influence of Quo Vadis? on D. W. Griffith was immediately apparent. Although Griffith states that he never saw it, nevertheless its very existence made it possible for him to produce, in that same year, Judith of Bethulia, the first 4-reel film in America and a forerunner of his masterpieces, The Birth of a Nation and Intolerance. Added to the success of Quo Vadis?, subsequent successful importations of other long films, such as Bernhardt's Queen Elizabeth and La Dame aux Camélias, inspired American producers to expand their pictures to what we have now come to consider feature length, and their nickelodeons to movie palaces,

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The story of Quo Vadis?, adapted from Sienkiewicz's famous novel, is laid in Rome at the time of Nero. Vinitius, a military tribune just returned to Rome, has fallen in love with Lygia, daughter of the Lygian king. The romance is fostered by Petronius, uncle of Vinitius and a favorite of Nero. But Petronius falls from favor when he berates Nero for his wanton burning of Rome. Nero places the blame on the Christians (this is the first century after Christ) and, to appease the multitude, has them rounded up to be fed to the lions. Lygia is among their number. In the Colosseum a chariot race precedes the massacre. The Christians are then driven into the arena and the lions set loose upon them. Finally, Lygia, tied to the back of a bull, appears in the arena but is saved from death by her slave, Ursus, who grapples with the bull and throws him. Against his will, Nero is forced by the populace to free Lygia. The film ends as Peter the Apostle flees Rome. On the Appian Way Jesus appears to him. "Quo vadis?" He asks, and, with the death of Nero, an apotheosis of Christ's love for humanity appears on the screen.

The same story was again filmed in Italy in 1924, this time with Emil Jannings as Nero. The two versions are often confused, but the 1912 version is the one of true classic importance.

The Film Library's print of Quo Vadis? is on tinted stock, used with great effect in such scenes as the burning of Rome in red tint and the cages full of lions in tawny yellow tint. The print, coming from Switzerland, carries titles in French and German. In showing and circulating it, the Film Library will translate titles into English. Quo Vadis?, based on the novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz, was directed by Enrico Guazzoni and produced by Cines.